

# Sheep NewZ

#32 Spring 2023



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### Hello Members,

Thanks to all who supplied material for this issue of the Sheep NewZ. It's a bit like pulling teeth!

Finally, here at home we have had a short run of fine weather, now halfway through calving, and lambing's nearly finished. A big thank you to "The Muster of Australian Breeders of Stud Sheep" [The Muster] for granting me permission to use some of their articles in coming issues of the Sheep NewZ.

This time there is one of Jon Hickford's and one on the importance of colostrum. Also, an item from the NZ Farmers Weekly about groundbreaking Kingsmeade Dairy's principals who are now retiring. *(All above mentioned articles reprinted with permission.)*



*Young Shropshire pet lambs at Prior Stud. Note they are wearing disposable baby nappies as they were inside for a couple of days.*

**Helen McKenzie**  
**Editor**

☎ (06) 372 7842 or

Email: [rosemarkie@wise.net.nz](mailto:rosemarkie@wise.net.nz)

### Front cover photo

Three of Ravenswood English Leicester stud's ewe hoggets.

## ASSOCIATION NEWS & VIEWS

### From the President

Hello to all members and welcome to the Spring edition of Sheep NewZ.



Introducing myself, I am Mark Copland, a farmer from Ashburton and like many others before me, passionate about the breeding and production of sheep in our industry.

I would like to thank Tom Burrows for his years of service as immediate past President before me and to wish him, Fiona, and their family well for the future.

The weather in the later part of Winter seems to have settled down a bit since a very wet third week in July. It did not take us very long around these parts to put good Autumn saved pasture and winter crops back into the ground.

Very little rain at all for August has probably got the early lambs off to a good start, but not having to put the leggings on during this time could well see us looking for moisture at some stage soon.

Product prices for Mutton and Lamb have seemed to have taken on some sort of a major price reset. Not good news initially but those with lamb contracts for this Spring are possibly thanking their lucky stars.

Some of you will be aware of a Rural Life article I was asked to contribute to recently on the Government's floor cladding in rural schools using nylon carpet squares. Unfortunately, the more you looked into this the more disturbing the whole thing becomes. I won't dwell anymore, but I would like to quote our eldest grand-daughter's opening paragraph in her recent school speech competition on the matter.

"As a fifth-generation farmer, instead of feeling proud that a NZ based sustainable product has been chosen, I am disappointed, upset and insulted that the government has chosen to be so hypocritical in this 'carpet in schools' decision."

Just to clarify, schools are asked to be sustainable, to teach environmental knowledge and limit their carbon footprint.

In closing, I would like to wish Ian Stevenson, Past President and Life Member of NZSBA, and a member of the NZ Sheep Dog Trial team, all the best for the upcoming Trans-Tasman Test series against Australia to be held at this year's Ashburton Show, 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> October.

Also, all the best for Spring and the rest of lambing to everyone.

**Mark Copland**  
**President NZSBA**





## From The General Manager



Our NZSBA Council and AGM meetings were held in mid-July, and below is a brief meeting report -

### OBITUARIES

- Mr R McLachlan, Mr 'Blue' Fletcher, Mr B R Rapley, Mr J du Faur, Mr S Clifton, Mr E M Skurr, Mr D Buick, Mr J McWilliams, Mr C Mullen.

### ELECTION OF PRESIDENT

- Mr M M Copland was re-elected President.

### ELECTION OF SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT - Ms P

Loffhagen was elected Senior Vice-President.

### ELECTION OF JUNIOR VICE-PRESIDENT - Mr C J

Hampton was elected Junior Vice-President.

### ANNUAL REPORT AND ACCOUNTS were approved.

### 'Sheep 125' – Now 'Sheep 130'

– Agreed to hold a breed display in 2024 depending on how changes to the NZ Agricultural show now look.

### Eye Muscle Scanning Workshop

– Beef + Lamb New Zealand Genetics have agreed to partial funding and the intention is to run a workshop for all eye muscle scanners early next year.

### NZ Sheepbreeders' Association Advertisements

– Advertisements were placed in Country-Wide last year, and it was agreed to run a series of ads in the Farmers Weekly this year.

### Annual Returns

– now online, and single entries and ram and ewe transfers to also go online.

### Breed Committees

- Some breeds are evaluating the number of Breed Committee members they now require due to declining flocks in some regions.

### Sheep for Sale Site

- Members are starting to utilise this site.

### Forsyth Barr

– the management of the NZSBA financial portfolio by Forsyth Barr to be reassessed next year, after a couple of years of disappointing returns on our investments.

**Staff leaving**– Ms A Stewart is leaving Office and the Council wish her well for her future and thank her for her work for the Association.

## The NZSBA organize an Annual Conference for all breeds.

– Some breeds struggle to have a conference whilst other breeds always get good numbers.

After a discussion – agreed.

- When a breed sends their conference notice to the office, they are asked if they wish to open up their conference to other breeds.

### Sheep 130

– **2024 - a NZSBA Tour proposed** – to be determined.

**That the breeds under the NZSBA collectively work together for the improvement of meat quality for the betterment of the industry**

– Agreed stud breeders have no voice, and we lack leaders in the industry.

**The NZSBA Has Its Own "Youth Initiatives" and sponsor \$1,000.00 to the winner of the Youth Judging Competition at the NZ Agricultural Show**

– **Agreed** 'That the NZSBA encourages Youth Education Days'.

### Fairlie A & P Show

– Fairlie Show recently had 3 classes for junior stud breeders.

**Action** – to target a circuit of a few local A & P Shows and the winners to go to Christchurch. Due to the time of the year, the final maybe at Fairlie.

### APPOINTMENT OF FINANCIAL ACCOUNTANTS -

Brown, Glassford and Co were re-appointed our Financial Accountants for 2023-2024.

### Youth Initiative – Texel

– The Texel breed suggested the age limit be raised from 21 to 30 years of age, and this was withdrawn due to lack of support.

### Outgoing President

– Mr R C Todhunter gave a vote of thanks to the outgoing President Mr Tom Burrows and thanked him for all his effort as President. Mr M M Copland also thanked Mr T J Burrows for all his effort and diligence whilst President and wished him well for the future.

### Commemorative Jerseys - for sale –

#### PRICE REDUCTION

- Cost of Jerseys – Men's - \$140.00 – Ladies - \$115.00 and these can be posted anywhere in New Zealand. Check out our website for more details.

### Tag Discounts

- **Shearwell, & Allflex**, - Now offering discounted tags to members. When ordering please state you are a member of

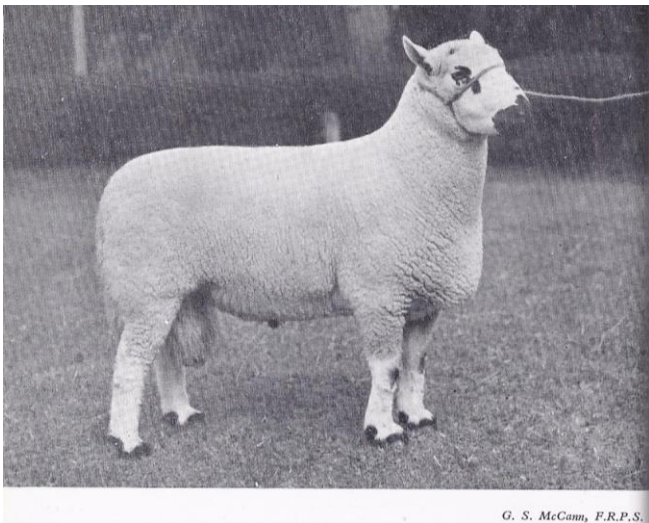
NZSBA, and they will send the product to you, but will send your invoice to our office, and we will then invoice you.

**News Alert** – Due to difficulties in appointing a person to the position of Office Administrator, Anne has decided to delay her retirement for now...

To our sponsors and to Helen thank you for your continued support.

**Greg Burgess**  
**General Manager,**  
**NZSBA**

A Recent Arrival to the NZ Sheep Breeding World is the  
**Kerry Hill** Breed from the UK.



*A typical sheep of the breed (Stockley Commander 22874),  
Champion at the Kerry show and Sale 1944*

**Excerpt from British Purebred Sheep, 1945/46: -**

The registered Kerry Hill of today [1945] is a splendid sheep – hardy, alert, with a dense white fleece of outstanding quality; compact, yet of good size and weight, and with the sharply defined black and white markings which makes a Kerry Hill flock most attractive to the eye. Adaptability is a useful quality in this sheep. She can live on a hill in Wales or on a feeding pasture in the Midlands; she can make the best use of a re-seeded mountain or a rich young ley and she is being asked for in Scotland because her wool is closer and she needs less maggotting than some of the native breeds. She is wonderfully sound on her feet too – a well-known Midland Flock master tried two pedigree breeds of Down sheep on his rich river meadows but could keep neither of them on their feet. He changed to pedigree Kerries with great success, and now has little trouble with foot rot.

None of these qualities matter much, however, unless the ewe is a good mother; and here the Kerry is outstanding. She takes to her lambs well and milks like a cow – hence the rapid

growth and wonderfully good weight returns of Kerry cross lambs.

The Kerry Hill (Wales) sheep is hardy, adaptable, prolific and the economical breed for ley farming.

Nat. Library, *Papers Past*. Poverty Bay Herald, 29. 1937.

**KERRY HILL SHEEP PURCHASE FOR WAIKARI –  
NOTABLE WELSH BREED - 10 EWES AND 2 RAMS.**

Ten ewes and two rams of the Kerry Hill breed arrived at Waikari yesterday for Mr John Tait, who is one of the most progressive sheep farmers of the district, and the representative of the Mohaka Riding on the Wairoa County Council. During residence in the United States, and also in the Argentine, Mr Tait secured valuable experience, and is using modern methods in farm machinery. The consignment consists of 10 stud ewes, one stud 1 shear ram and one stud ram lamb and are outstanding types of this noted breed from Montgomeryshire, Wales.

This is the first importation of Kerry Hill sheep to New Zealand and has been carried out by the stud department of Messrs. Williams and Kettle, Hastings on behalf of Mr Tait.

Registered with the NZSBA 1938-50.



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## FARMERS WEEKLY

“Fostering the improvement of all sheep breeds and providing a unified body whose collective voice  
has a beneficial effect on the total New Zealand sheep industry.”

# Feature Breed

## English Leicester



Dishley Leicester, Painting by J. Digby-Curtis, The Royal Agricultural University Collection

### Brief History

In the United Kingdom, the Leicester Longwool is a long-established breed. It underwent major changes in the 18th century when an animal genetics pioneer, Robert Bakewell, began breeding for a smaller, earlier maturing carcase, greater fat coverage, and shorter legs. His success led to the Leicester’s use in developing other Longwool breeds. Now only about 500 registered ewes left in the UK (2023). The English Leicester was a pioneer breed, well suited to wetter Merino regions and rough grazing in North Island hill country, where the Merino had been tried and found unsuitable. It was among the earliest sheep imports to New Zealand and was used extensively as a crossing sire to develop sheep best suited to New Zealand conditions. At the turn of the century, the English Leicester vied for popularity with Lincolns and became established as New Zealand’s third most common breed. Flocks began to decline from the early 1900s, although the breed is still crossed with Merinos to produce the New Zealand Halfbred. The heavy curly lustrous wool is even in length and fibre diameter. Braids, linings for suits, coatings, costume clothes and furnishing fabrics are among end uses.

### Breed Description

Large. Body deep and long. Hardy, with good fertility. Dual purpose. Mainly used for creating cross-bred ewes and first-cross Halfbred (English Leicester x Merino) rams.

**Location:** The breed is found mostly in Canterbury in the South Island and in the North Island areas Wellington, Dannevirke and Te Kuiti.

Bodyweight
Ewes: 55-70 kg (121-154 lb) Rams: 73-93 kg (161-205 lb)
Meat
Light in colour and of good texture.
Breeding/Lambing
100-150 percent
Numbers
354 registered ewes (2022) Some few hundreds of commercial
Wool
Long and lustrous, of even length and fibre diameter. Good bulk. Locks curly, of medium width, showing a well-defined crimp. <b>Fibre diameter:</b> 37-40 microns. <b>Staple length:</b> 150-200 mm (6-8 inches). <b>Fleece weight:</b> Range 5-6 kg (11-13 lb); Average 5.5 kg (12 lb). <b>Uses:</b> Braids, suit linings, coatings, costume clothes and furnishing fabrics.



English Leicester fleece

Modern English Leicester ram



“Fostering the improvement of all sheep breeds and providing a unified body whose collective voice has a beneficial effect on the total New Zealand sheep industry.”



## STUD PROFILE #1

### RAVENSWOOD STUD FLOCK Flock #406

Established 1886, Pauatahanui, Wellington

Owned by Fiona and John Robinson

In 2016 my father, Ivor Robinson passed away leaving Margaret to run the stud single handedly for a while, and then the entire stud flock was dispersed around two years later. Fiona and I made the decision to continue running the stud, I selected seven young 'true to type' ewes and transported them by truck and ferry across the Cook Strait to our property north of Wellington.

There are very few English Leicester studs remaining in New Zealand, and English Leicester sheep are now considered a rare breed. Given the history of the Ravenswood stud which dates back over 100 years, we didn't want Ravenswood stud to disappear forever, and can see a future in the strong lustrous wool.

Wool as we all know from these coarser breeds barely covers the cost of shearing, but the English Leicester wool commands a premium price to local felt makers like Cozy Felt. Spinners and weavers love to work with the English Leicester fibre for use in rugs, wall hangings appealing for its length, unique lustre or shine, and strength.

Over the last couple of years, Fiona has experimented having fleeces processed into carded sliver by Kane Carding, selling both processed and greasy fleece wool (for hand spun yarn) at the local fibre fest fair.

The progeny we aim to sell as lambs and have found over the last couple of years ready markets for both ram and ewe lambs, particularly amongst Valais breeders.

Whilst small in numbers, initially 5-7 ewes mated and this year 13 ewes, we have gradually increased the numbers and main focus is on true-to-type English Leicester's with clear open faces, strong lustrous wool, sound dark black coloured feet avoiding foot-rot on our hills and flats, and trouble-free lambing where the ewes have an excellent mothering ability.

We are extremely grateful to Gavin and Theo Henricksen in Dannevirke for the use of excellent Te Paumiti rams over the years, and for the opportunity last year to purchase three 2-tooth ewes from the Ellesmere stud (Vivan Manson) to add some genetic diversity to the flock.

Challenging times for these traditional wool breeds, but Fiona is getting the rewards by selling to local users and hopeful that small initiatives she has made by providing the fibre to design students for their projects and direct contact with non-traditional users of NZ wool for fabrics may in time bring some recognition for this wonderful fibre.

We forever hope!!!

*John Robinson*



*Two tooth ewe, born September 2021, Sire: is Te Paumiti 429-19, Dam: Ravenswood 4-2018*



*Fiona with her stall publicising Ravenswood English Leicesters & their products at Capital Fibre Fest in Upper Hutt, June 2023*

"Fostering the improvement of all sheep breeds and providing a unified body whose collective voice has a beneficial effect on the total New Zealand sheep industry."



**STUD PROFILE #2**

Aeolia Leicesters, Flock #664

**Established 2017, Wellington****Owned by Sydney Shep****OFF THE SHEEP'S BACK**

Woolly ➤  
English  
Leicester  
lambs ready  
to be shorn



If you re-read your December 2018 newsletter, you may remember my piece about the establishment of my white stud flock and some insights into the breeding programme with my coloured English Leicesters. You may also have noticed from the flock book that I don't always breed my white stud animals annually. This gives me the opportunity to alternate between coloured and white rams and to grow on my lambs – but more about them later.

For the last few years, my husband and I have been helping out at Rewa Rewa Station in the back hill country of the Tinui district just west of Castlepoint in the Wairapapa. Owner Patrizia Vieno (with her late partner Rod Clutton) runs a 1000ha award-winning sheep and beef farm as well as a fibre operation that is growing by leaps and bounds. In addition to white romneys and coloured gotlands, polwarths, and romney-corriedale crosses, Patrizia runs alpacas and cashmere goats. Her passion for all things fibre underwrites her unwavering ethical commitment to sustainability and provenance. In addition, she opens the farm on the third Saturday of every month for Craft Day, where anyone can drop in, share a cuppa, bring a project, tour the studio, and meet fellow enthusiasts. Visitors are also welcome at other times, staying over in her exquisitely restored heritage farm buildings.

Several times a year we take to the road, appearing at various markets across the North Island where we sell sheepskins, carded and gilled sliver, naturally dyed wool, finished wool

products, and more. We share a longstanding fascination with natural dyeing and started experimenting with local barks, roots, and flowers as well as imported dyestuffs. While Patrizia was overdyeing her romney hogget and lambswool, I started playing with my white and coloured English Leicester lamb locks.

Now most farmers do an early shear so their hogget fleeces don't have woolly tips. Moreover, processors have trouble with the longwool breeds because they don't go through their machines easily. This means EL breeders are often faced with a nine- or six-month shearing cycle. As for the price of wool, let's not go there. I, however, grow on my lambs so that my lamb locks average 8-10cm. Why? Lambswool is, in my estimation, one of the most undervalued products in the New Zealand wool landscape. Everywhere else, particularly in Scotland, lambswool is the foundation of fine woven textiles, knitted jerseys, and high street garments. Sadly, when I offered to sponsor an award for lambswool at the annual National Coloured Sheep competition, I was laughed off the stage. So what's the problem and can we solve it?

There are so few EL breeders left in New Zealand that rarely do people see, know or understand these amazing animals. Whatever we can do to show off the breed helps. Whenever someone visiting our market stand dips their hands into mounds of white and coloured lamb locks, the look on their face speaks volumes: soft, luscious, shiny, enticing. And the range of naturally dyed intense colours sends felters, weavers, and spinners alike into a tizz.



◀ *Naturally dyed English Leicester lamb locks*

Each time we share our products we are educating a brand new audience, both young and old. The next step? Patrizia is starting a fibre mill on the farm and we will be able to control the entire process from farm to fashion ourselves: breeding, shearing, scouring, picking, carding, spinning, finishing, designing, making, selling. Modelled on the Fibreshed movement, we see a buoyant future in ethically sourced, sustainably manufactured, and quality designed and made goods. The planet is relying on small producers like us to lead the charge. So why not give English Leicesters a go and help save a rare breed?

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“Fostering the improvement of all sheep breeds and providing a unified body whose collective voice has a beneficial effect on the total New Zealand sheep industry.”



## ENGLISH LEICESTER

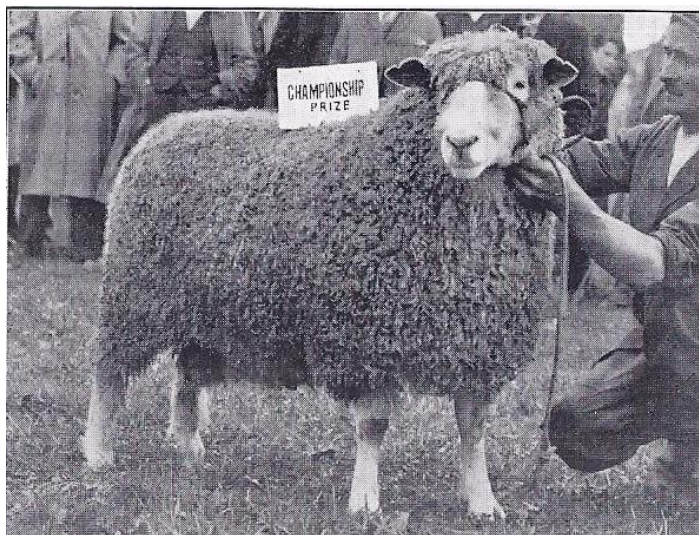
*Haywold Haniebal Oak. Champion at the Society's Sale in 1943 and retained in the flock for stud purposes. ➤*

The Haywold No. 60 flock of Leicesters was the property of Sir William Prince-Smith, Bart., OBE., M.C., East Yorkshire. He was the third Baronet and died in 1964.

From Wikipedia:

'The **Smith**, later **Prince-Smith Baronetcy**, of Hillbrook in the County of York, was a title in the Baronetage of the United Kingdom. It was created on 11 February 1911 for Prince Smith, head of Prince-Smith and Stells, textile engineers, of Keighley, West Yorkshire. The second Baronet assumed the additional surname of Prince. The title became extinct on the death of the fourth Baronet in 2007.'

*Photo and blurb from the book, "British Purebred Sheep published in 1945/46.*



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"Fostering the improvement of all sheep breeds and providing a unified body whose collective voice has a beneficial effect on the total New Zealand sheep industry."



# A sheep farm producing dairy and DNA

Sheep milking wouldn't have been the choice for many in the late 1990s when Miles and Janet King bought a plot of land near Masterton, but they thought it would suit their skills. Having built a thriving cheese and genetics business over the past 25 years, they're ready to pass it on. **Bryan Gibson** reports.

**J**ANET and Miles King's start in the sheep milking trade got off to a rough start.

They had stocked their farm with milking ewes, bred from crossing Coopworth ewes with East Friesian genetics, only for the company that agreed to buy their milk to have a change of heart.

The couple decided to have a go at making cheese themselves and Kingsmeade Artisan Dairy was born.

Being early adopters, the Kings had to make their own way through the challenges of compliance and food safety.

"The compliance people only thought of cows, of dairy factories dealing with cow's milk," Miles says.

"We luckily got quite a lot of help from what was MAF [the then Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry]."

Miles knows so much about the process now that he's often consulted by compliance staff looking for sheep dairy expertise.

The novelty of the operation attracted a lot of media interest from the likes of Country Calendar and Rural Delivery.

But it was tough going, with the interest slow to turn into sales.

The Kings sold through supermarkets to begin with but soon found restaurants and farmers market shoppers were the keenest buyers.

"The cost of making cheese out from sheep milk was a lot higher than cow's milk," Miles says. "So we wouldn't discount. It was very hard so we got out of most of those [supermarkets], although

we still sell to the likes of Common Sense and the more upmarket supermarkets."

Providing restaurants with bulk, high-end cheeses was also a success – until covid-19 came along.

"We did have a really tough time over covid when all the restaurants were shut," Janet says.

"That's caused us quite a bit of angst the past three years and we're coming out of that now. It was very difficult. I know you shouldn't have your all your eggs in one basket, but the nature of the product and the price of the product really puts it into a higher market."

Over time, word has spread and sheep milk's attributes are being sought by more and more people.

The Kings did a lot of legwork to spread the word themselves, of course, giving more than 100 talks to various organisations.

But while starting Kingsmeade made Miles into a cheesemaker, his passion is the animals.

Over the years he's kept impeccable records as he worked to breed



**MOVING ON:** Miles and Janet King think the time is right for them to pass on their sheep milking business to its next owner.

the perfect milking sheep for New Zealand's environment.

That work is paying off and the Dairymeade genetics are now being sold globally.

To get to that stage, the Kings asked renowned Massey University epidemiologist Professor Roger Morris for some help.

Miles turned his records over to Morris, who was surprised by what he saw.

"Miles had the best set of animal records that I've ever come across, dating back right to the

formation of the flock.

"So I helped him get that together and brought in Professor Nicolas Lopez-Villalobos in as the geneticist and went through the process of getting the breed recognised. I also help on the issues of maintaining its high health status and so forth, which is critical to exports."

Morris also connected the Kings with Monterra dairy, which now milks 9000 Dairymeade sheep at its facility in Inner Mongolia.

"Monterra wants to act as the marketing company for genetics in China," Morris says.

"So they would then onsell the embryos, in particular, to a range of other dairy-sheep producers in China."

Morris says sheep milk is very popular in China.

"Sheep milk is very good for young children, babies and toddlers. So a range of different products are being produced for different ages of children.

"We've got potential arrangements being set up

**“Miles had the best set of animal records that I've ever come across, dating back right to the formation of the flock.”**

**Professor Roger Morris  
Massey University**

with a nearby AI centre in Woodville to produce the embryos and export them.

"It seems to me a perfect opportunity for someone in New Zealand to pick up."

So what does the perfect NZ milking ewe look like?

"It's still largely the East Friesian, but with 25 years of development we've made a more stable animal for New Zealand conditions," Miles says.

"The temperament has had a big, big influence on the letdown. So the sheep settle down quickly, whereas originally we had to do quite a lot of manipulation to get them to release that milk."

"They had to have hardiness, there were some very thin-skinned sheep that did not survive very well. They didn't have that stamina to put up with NZ's conditions."

With the covid-19 downturn behind them and the genetics business maturing, the Kings reckon it is time to move on.

Their children and grandchildren live in Australia and the hope is to join them there soon.

"We've got three daughters, all living overseas with families. And when you're as committed to a business as we have been, we've got teenage grandsons we've seen five times in their life," Janet says.

"So at some point, you realise that you have to back off and wind down. But there's a lot of potential in the business."

"It's been an amazing experience."



**GOOD EWES:** Dairymeade milking ewes are quick to release their milk and are hardy enough to thrive in New Zealand's environment.



# SMART SHEPHERDING WITH SCIENCE

JON HICKFORD

*How technology can help sheep breeders reduce and even almost eradicate devastating diseases in their flock. In this article we talk with Jon Hickford, a Professor at Lincoln University in New Zealand, about gene testing to breed better animals that are naturally resistant and are more productive.*

## WHY ARE GENES SO IMPORTANT?

The basis of breeding is knowing that something has some degree of heritability says Jon Hickford. Jon is an acclaimed researcher and lecturer in Science and Agriculture with over 30 years of experience. We know that highly heritable traits can be bred for easily and vice versa for low heritability traits. We've now come to a better understanding that that's all driven by the genes, by the DNA of an animal, or plant or human. So Jon and his team at Lincoln University in New Zealand aim to understand how DNA affects the performance of livestock, and has a big impact on livestock productivity and performance.

Jon and his team's research looks for those genes that underpin diseases or other characteristics that can severely diminish the performance of an animal or cause it some sort of health or welfare effect. For some of the diseases of livestock it is a single gene defect. A lot of the research has been done in Australia with Australian stud breeders, focusing on eradicating particular forms of genes that are really quite devastating to the sheep industry.

## WHICH DISEASES ARE THESE?

### MICROPTHALMIA IN AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND TEXEL SHEEP

This was a real success story. This disease was a problem for the Texel stud breeders about 15-20 years ago. The condition causes blindness. So the researchers developed a new gene test based on some science done in Germany that allowed breeders to identify their Microphthalmia carrying sheep. And they've been using that tool ever since.

'We can never be absolutely sure of eradication, but there is an ongoing dialogue about not letting Microphthalmia ever show its head again in Australia and New Zealand' says Jon. 'There are still some Texel-cross genetics out there that make us suspicious,' he suggests. It is a risk using unregistered genetics and not tracking pedigree when you're dealing with a disease like this.



### DERMATOSPARAXIS A SKIN CONDITION IN WHITE DORPERS

This disease impacts young lambs, their skin is like tissue paper and if you pick the lump up the skin just rips. It was rampant within New Zealand and Australia.

This disease is also seen in cows, dogs, humans and cats Jon advises. 'That gave us a good clue on the genetics. We looked at the gene that was implicated, in all those other species, and it was faulty in sheep, and specifically in white Dorper sheep. So we again, developed a gene test probably 10 years ago now and worked with the Australian and New Zealand Dorper breeders. We put about five years in working with the Dorper Stud Sheep Association of Australia. We probably worked with about 70 of the Dorper studs. I'd like to be able to say we eradicated it, but I suspect it's still there too. There are people that don't follow good breeding practices or don't record and are not associated with the various breeding associations' says Jon.

### GAUCHER DISEASE IN SOUTHDOWNS

This is a neurodegenerative disease, which is similar to Gaucher disease in humans. Eventually the sheep fall over and die. 'We found what the underlying mutation was, and that some of the Southdowns were carrying this. We worked with some of the leading Southdown breeders to eradicate

it. Again, you can never say it's completely disappeared, but within New Zealand and Australia Southdown populations we're pretty sure there's not much or none left. The Australian Southdowns seemed to have it far more prolifically than the New Zealand populations' suggests Jon.

All three of these diseases are fatal and would be devastating if they were in your stud.

## WHAT ARE OTHER USES OF GENE TESTING?

Another angle to the gene testing is about making good breeding decisions. Like footrot resistance and cold tolerance for example.

'Some sheep mount a much more effective immune response to footrot than others, and you can expose them to footrot, they'll get it for a short period of time, but they gain immunity really quickly. And they never get it again, unless they're really rundown. They're basically resilient. With other sheep, you cannot get rid of footrot, it just persists if the conditions are right.

We found that the ones that were susceptible to footrot had particular forms of immune response genes. They couldn't mount an effective immune response' Jon said.

'We first found that with Merino and Corriedale sheep in New Zealand. Then later also found the same forms of the

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## WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT TRAITS TO FOCUS ON?

Jon suggests these four traits are the most important ones to focus on when breeding sheep:

- Growth is the key trait in terms of the future, especially in relation to carbon which will affect all farmers. While we know of some genes for growth it's actually also easy to breed for growth. The key measurement is weaning weight. It's about improving your weaning weight each year. This is a great way to increasing your productivity.
- Reproductive rate is an important trait to focus on. You need to have more lambs if you want to be more profitable. Lambing percentage is something you can measure but it's not particularly heritable, so you make slow progress.
- Also the birth weight of lambs. Bigger birth weight lambs grow faster and are less likely to die. Preferably you want birth weight over 3.5kg, preferably more than 4kg. Once they drop to 2.5kg they tend to die. You want to get rid of ewes that don't birth well. The size of the birth canal is a heritable trait.
- Late pregnancy feeding is how you can impact birth weight and at the same time prevent lambing difficulties due to birth weight being too big or too small. If you also get your birth rate up then there will be more twins and twins are smaller so you will be less likely to have difficulties. So there's a balance between these factors.

*Jon Hickford is a Professor at Lincoln University. He is married to Kim and has lived in Lyttelton (near Christchurch) for nearly 30 years. He has four fabulous children Thomas, William, James and Isabelle, ranging in age from 22 down to 8. The outdoors and mountains rule his life!*



gene in certain breeds in other countries being the German Black Mutton Merino, Greek milking sheep and the Spanish Merinos' he said.

The footrot gene test is the most used test and has made such a difference to sheep farmers.

Cold tolerance testing, was developed specifically for New Zealand due to the conditions, altitude and time of year of lambing creating very cold temperatures. 'Death rates among the Merino lambs was high, and on some farms 50% of lambs were dying. Factors that contribute are birth weight, and also the inability to mount an effective response to the cold – thermogenesis. There's a certain gene that makes lambs far more susceptible to cold related deaths, called Starvation Mis-mothering Exposure (SME)' asserts Jon.

The test for this was developed 9-10 years ago. Jon recalled how one farmer at altitude in New Zealand who uses the test has 175% lambing every year, with good birth weights. Jon refers to these as performance genes.

There are also gene tests that allow us to find more muscle. Popular with people that produce Texel and Texel-cross sheep, and it does increase meat yield.

A Flystrike gene test is still a work in process in the research lab. It may be to do with the right type of lanolin on the wool which protects or is less susceptible to flystrike so watch this space!

'We do a test for Scrapie – Australia's never had it but there is an international standard and regulation that requires gene testing. 'There's a lot of bureaucracy involved in exporting sheep and the tests are generally done through expensive endorsed laboratories, but you can minimise the costs if you do the initial testing to find scrapie

resistant genetics through the University', suggests Jon.

## HOW DO PEOPLE USE THE SERVICES?

The gene testing facility operates in 14 countries through the Lincoln University Gene-Marker Laboratory <https://research.lincoln.ac.nz/testing-analytical-services/gene-marker-lab>, all the information is there on how you can use any of the tests.

To physically do the testing the lab will send out cards which you collect blood on. You can easily do it yourself. Only a drop of blood about the size of the end of a pencil is required on the card.

The research team can do more than one test from that one small drop of blood. An import permit goes with that for the blood to be able to enter New Zealand.

Then the team send you comprehensive details on how you might use the information as part of your breeding decisions, and are available to discuss things further. Their focus is all about maximising performance for your sheep enterprise. The cost is \$25 AUD per gene test.

The best way to use the results are to take out the sheep which are most susceptible to the problem, not use it to pick which ones to specifically breed with. Culling out the weak, rather than trying to back winners is what Jon advises. If you try to pick the best from gene testing and try to aim for perfection that way something else can pop up down the track. Balance is needed. 'Breeding is a cautious considered art!' asserts Jon.

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# CRITICAL COLOSTRUM

*Colostrum is the first milk a newborn lamb will receive from its mother. A concentrated mix of vitamins, minerals, fats, protein, carbohydrates, antimicrobials, growth and immune factors. It acts as a laxative, aids ewe and lamb bonding, provides energy for thermoregulation and acts as a vital source of immunoglobulins required for passive immunity against intestinal and respiratory pathogens.*

Lamb morbidity and mortality has a significant impact on sheep production systems with the majority of pre-weaning losses occurring within the first two weeks of life. Poor quality and quantity of colostrum in the first 24 hours plays a significant role in lamb death, disease, future growth and reproductive performance.

Immediately postpartum, the lamb experiences an environmental and microbial assault. Lambs have a small surface area to weight ratio, once exposed to the environment, they lose heat quickly and require a boost of rapidly usable energy to aid essential thermoregulation. Cold, wet and windy conditions accelerate heat loss and add extra stressors. Colostrum is vital to stave off hypoglycaemia and hypothermia as it is energy dense with fats, lactose and non-immune proteins necessary to generate heat. Approximately 150-290ml/kg of colostrum is required in the first 24 hours depending on weather conditions, ideally with 50ml/kg received immediately after birth (Banchero, 2015).

Timing of colostrum feeds is critical due to gastrointestinal development, immune function and thermoregulatory needs. Lambs are born with naïve immune systems, leaving them vulnerable to infection. Colostrum is rich in immunoglobulins IgG, IgA and IgM. Concentrations rise in the colostrum approximately one week prior to

lambing, peak at birth, then decline rapidly 24 hours post-partum. This coincides with the lamb's physiological ability to absorb large proteins through the intestinal wall. At birth the lamb's intestinal epithelium absorbs immunoglobulins, passing them through the gut lining to the lymphatic system where they enter circulation providing passive immunity. Absorption peaks around 4-6 hours post-partum then declines rapidly 24-48 hours after birth. Digestive enzymes, absent at birth, are upregulated after this window, leading to degradation of large proteins including immunoglobulins thus preventing further transfer. If serum immunoglobulin levels do not reach a critical concentration in the first 24 hours, there is a failure of passive transfer which leaves the lamb vulnerable to infection.

To reduce lamb losses and maximise growth and reproductive potential, the ewe's nutrition is paramount. Mammary development occurs in the last month of gestation which the majority in the final week pre-partum. A change in the ratio of circulating progesterone and estrogen triggers lactogenesis (the onset of milk production) in co-ordination with lambing (Banchero, 2015). This system is finely tuned, thus factors affecting hormonal levels will impact colostrum quality. Progesterone prevents lactation and parturition and a decrease signals the final stages of pregnancy. Underweight, overweight and twin

bearing ewes may have elevated levels of progesterone thereby delaying lactogenesis.

Apart from hormone levels, other key factors play a role in colostrum production. The ewe's nutritional status impacts available glucose which plays a major role in the quantity of milk produced. Underweight ewes tend to produce lower volumes of more viscous colostrum which requires more work for the lamb to suckle. The low volume of milk necessitates more frequent and longer sucklings to provide the required energy and immunoglobulins. Obese ewes often produce good milk quantity, however it may contain reduced concentrations of immunoglobulins (Banchero, 2015). Both conditions are suboptimal and may impact lamb morbidity and mortality and reflect the impact of body condition on colostrum production.

In situations of underweight ewes and those bearing multiple lambs, supplementing with starch rich cereal grains, such as maize, barley and oats can increase colostrum yields. Grains requiring more post ruminal digestion, such as maize, affect greater impact on colostrum yield due to glucose availability (Banchero, 2015). Along with starch supplementation, additional protein helps lactogenesis, boosting colostrum levels. Protein consumption aids the digestion of starches, however excessive levels of protein can negatively impact colostrum production by impairing cellular uptake of glucose and should be avoided.

Glucose and immunoglobulins are vital components of colostrum, however other factors play a role in lamb survival. Antimicrobials such as lactoferrin, lysozymes and lactoperoxidase are required to fight bacterial, viral and fungal pathogens. Vitamins and minerals are essential to aid nerve and muscle growth, development and function. First colostrum contains the highest concentration of these nutrients. Colostrum from ewes receiving a balanced diet should have adequate stores of essential vitamins and minerals. Where deficiencies are suspected, consider supplements carefully. Adding selenium and zinc to deficient diets has been shown to positively



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impact colostrum yield and immunoglobulin concentration (Stewart, 2013). However, adding some vitamins in excess has been shown to impact the lamb's ability to absorb nutrients from colostrum (Boland, 2005). Therefore care should be taken when supplementing pregnant ewes.

Colostrum production differs between sheep breeds and is affected by the age of ewes, number of lambs, time of year, and nutritional and body condition. Many factors can be controlled, and with careful ewe management, colostrum production can be optimised, reducing production losses and maximising gains in growth and future reproductive performance.

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## WOOL – AND HOW IT GROWS

A revised series of article on aspects of wool biology.  
(First published in *Black & Coloured Sheepbreeders'*  
*magazine Issue #17, November 1980*) By Roland  
Sumner, AgResearch, Whatawhata Research Centre.  
Reprinted with permission of BCSBA & Roland  
Sumner.

**Thank you to Dr Sumner for the use of these  
informative articles.**

### Part 9 (Final article)

#### FACTORS AFFECTING WOOL PRICE

Have you ever wondered why some wools be they coloured or white, sell for more than others? It is simply supply and demand. The more uses to which a particular lot of wool can be put the higher the price. There are widely recognised standards for white wool in terms of its suitability for particular uses. While these also apply to pigmented wools the range of commercial end uses for these wool types is less. Where pigmented wools are preferred for some end-use fashion trends may create a demand for a particular shade with an associated price differential. Other than the colour of pigmented wool the main factors which affect wool price are grease content, fineness, length, amount of fibre entanglement and in the case of white wool, the presence of unscourable discolouration.

Most products need to be of uniform and repeatable colour. Tweeds and some felts are exceptions. Consequently, with white wool being the main wool commonly traded commercially, either white wools contaminated with coloured fibres or lines of pigmented wool are heavily downgraded by the commercial wool trade who describe “black” wool as an inferior type. Depending on the extent of contamination from pigmented fibres the value of white wools may be depressed by up to \$1.00 per kilo. **[Ed note: where prices are quoted throughout this article, they refer to 1982 prices].** With an increase over recent years in the number of commercial wool processors using predominantly pigmented wools to supply a particular segment of the market, prices for colour sorted pigmented fleece wool are now similar to equivalent white wool. On the other hand, crafts people may pay a



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premium of \$2.00 to \$5.00/kg for individual pigmented fleeces which give a special effect in a piece they are creating.

When a manufacturer buys greasy wool to process into yarn the grease contained in the wool is surplus to requirements. Consequently, it is very important when setting a price on a line of wool that the amount of grease in the line is either estimated or measured. The proportion of clean wool in a lot of Merino fleece wools may have a yield as low as 65% while cross-bred second shear wools may yield as high as 82%. At current prices [1982] a 1% difference in yield between two lots of cross-bred wool is equivalent to 5c/kg difference in greasy price and between two lots of Merino wool is equivalent to 10c/kg difference in greasy price. Oddments (bellies, pieces, locks and crutchings) always contain more grease than fleece wool. These wools are of little use to handcraft people and are almost always bought by the commercial wool trade. Consequently oddments, regardless of whether they are black or white are always worth less than fleece wools.



Fine wools generally tend to be more versatile than coarse wools, being used in clothing fabrics, knitting yarns and furnishing fabrics. Coarse wools are only used in coarse fabrics, felts and carpets. As a direct result of this change in the variety of potential end-uses there is a very clear relationship between wool fineness and price. Over the last 20 years fine Merino wools have tended to fetch about double the price at auction paid for coarse cross-bred (Romney type) wools.

Fine suiting fabrics with their defined and definite pattern are woven from yarn processed on the worsted system. This process requires relatively long strong fibres which will not break during combing. The actual lengths of the wools used depends on the fibres. Thus, while 75mm (3") long 20 micron (70's) Merino may be ideal for combing, 35 micron (48's) crossbred wool can

be 125-150mm (5-6") in length. Wools shorter than this are processed on either the semi-worsted, or more commonly, the woollen system. In these processes the fibres are not fully aligned by combing during processing and the fibres do not have to be so strong. The current price differential for length of white wool is 15-20c/kg greasy for each additional 25mm (1") in length. Thus a 100-125mm wool is likely to fetch about 30-40c/kg greasy more at auction than a similar type of 50-75mm wool. Although there are limited amounts of coloured wool sold through commercial outlets a clear price differential between 100-125mm and 500-75mm still applies. Craftspeople impose their own stringent demands on the length and soundness of wools suitable for their use, which is a major factor in their decision to purchase or reject a particular fleece. There is no graded response.

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Both manufacturers and craftspeople require a “free” fleece in which the staples can be readily separated. If fleeces are badly matted, or cotted, they must be torn apart or “opened” before processing. Mechanical openers can be very hard on matted wool and many fibres are broken. Cotted wool is thus worth considerably less than free wool. The extent of the price penalty is dependent on the degree of entanglement.

The presence of unscourable discolouration affects the colour to which white wool can be dyed. Yellow wools, for example, do not take pastel blue dyes well. While wool classers grade the amount of discolouration on a 5-point scale called style, all wool offered for sale at auction is objectively measured for colour pre-sale. Currently there is a price difference of approximately 50c/kg between “white” and “yellow” fleece wool [1982 prices remember. Ed.] Unscourable discolouration is not a consideration for dark coloured wool but may be important in lightly pigmented fleeces.

Other characteristics looked at by white wool buyers are handle (softness), bulkiness, lustre (shininess), and the presence of seed and vegetable matter. This latter fault can seriously affect a wool’s price as it limits the potential uses of that wool. Severe contamination requires that the wool pass through an extra process to remove it before normal processing. These self-same characteristics are also considered by craftspeople, with harsh handling fleeces and fleeces containing vegetable matter being rejected completely.

The white wool industry has strict requirements which tend to be reflected in the prices offered at auction. However, because many of the different characteristics which buyers consider, operate in different directions it can be hard sometimes, even for the experts, to determine exactly what the wool processing industry wants at any one time. This is not helped by the fact that it is often 6 months after purchase before some of the wool enters a processing plant, often on the other side of the world. Except for the odd quirk in the marketplace, prices for coloured wools, tend, not unnaturally, to be related to the prices of similar types of white wools as the requirement of worsted yarn manufacturers and craftspeople are similar.

Producers of both white and coloured wool can therefore maximise their wool returns by grouping their wool for sale on the basis of fineness (breed and age of sheep), length, colour and the region on the body from where the wool was shorn. By so doing they are offering their wool to processors in a manner best suited to the processor’s requirements. A nail manufacturer does not sell a builder a box of mixed length nails when the builder wants 100mm nails to assemble the framing for a house. Why should wool growers mix their wool types? Mixing wools will, in general, deleteriously affect wool prices as once wool leaves the farmgate there is little opportunity, particularly for pigmented wools, for further sorting and grading. As it is very difficult to “unmix” mixed wool it is best that the wool

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not be mixed and instead separated into its various types on the basis of fineness, length, colour and the region of the body from where it is grown, in preparation for sale, immediately it is shorn. Processors can then create repeatable blends to obtain particular effects for which customers are prepared to pay.

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## RYELAND FLOCK TOUR 2023 by H McKenzie

In April the members of the NZ Ryeland Sheep Society met in the Wairarapa for their A G M & flock tour.

The day began with a quick cuppa followed by the AGM at long established (1986) **Rosemarkie** Ryeland flock of Warwick Potts and Helen McKenzie at Longbush near Martinborough.

We were blessed with a day without rain although stout shoes or gumboots were recommended for the flock viewings.



▲ Ram hoggets at Rosemarkie



▲ One of the Rosemarkie ewe mobs in their mating group



▲ Waiting to order lunch at Tirohana

From there we adjourned to Martinborough for lunch at the Tirohana Estate vineyard. This was a very nice meal although the service was a little slow for those on a timetable.

The next stop was the **Balnacree** stud (Established 2019) of Russell and Kate Hooper of Greytown. They had sheep at a couple of different properties. We began with their home unit to view *the ram lambs and a couple of young rams*. ▼



▼ Ryeland ewes at Russell's parent's block in Carterton



▼ Centre is a 9 yr old **Eel Bend** ram leased from Jill Thomson & Hamish Rennie in Canterbury ▼



Next was a drive up to Mt Dick, a local high point, to look over the Wairarapa Valley. Unfortunately, a little haze impeded the view. After that it was back to Russell's for a cuppa and then most of us went to a local steakhouse in Carterton for dinner.

A very successful day. Great to see other flocks.

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# SUFFOLK SHEEP

## IN INNER MONGOLIA

by Donald Cochrane

Sino Sheep Genetic and Technology Company is a large conglomerate situated in several geographic and environmental locations in Inner Mongolia. The company specialises in sheep production with thousands of animals based on Suffolk, Dorper and native breeds. Smaller flocks of East Friesian and Texel are also run for experimental purposes. Dairy goats also feature as a large scale operation within the Sino portfolio.

The base farm and headquarters one and a half hours from the city of Hohhot is the breeding and technical hub of the other satellite properties owned by Sino. It is here that extensive Embryo and Artificial Insemination programmes are carried out. Up to 350 Suffolk ewes are in continuous ET programmes three or four times a year. ET and AI are also performed at other properties.

Suffolk ewes are bred and then backgrounded to lamb at other outlying grassland properties managed by local farmers. These extensive treeless grasslands are the southern extension of the massive Mongolian Grasslands and Russian Steppes system. Freezing in winter and hot during summer.

The almost 100% native grass content of the grasslands provides good grazing but is limited to seasonally harsh conditions and perhaps areas of low soil fertility on some properties. It was interesting to look at the variation in animal's teeth between properties. Some sheep of similar age had fine short teeth and evidence of fractured jaws at some stage. Whereas at other properties they had very large thick teeth which gave the impression of being slightly over the upper mouth pad.

The sheep are well cared for and managed by the farmers and all seem to have mineral supplements available. The farmers and shepherds appear to have a high degree of natural understanding of animal husbandry and breeding for their regions. Suffolk and native sheep are the preferred breeds to cope with the extremes of environmental conditions.

Sino is a very progressive company with bold future plans for producing specialist quality meat with high IMF and a strong focus on eating quality. They also have several up market restaurants where their product is available as well as video streaming of their farms within their restaurants, promoting 'paddock to plate'. They do it very well, something that most Australians would be too timid to try.

The most limiting factor for animal producing companies like Sino is the availability of genetics and efficient recording systems. Both can be resolved with expertise, technology and less Government bureaucracy. Sino employs very dedicated management personnel but doesn't have access to recording and genetic evaluation that other countries have, eg Lambplan, Stockscan or Signet. Given the

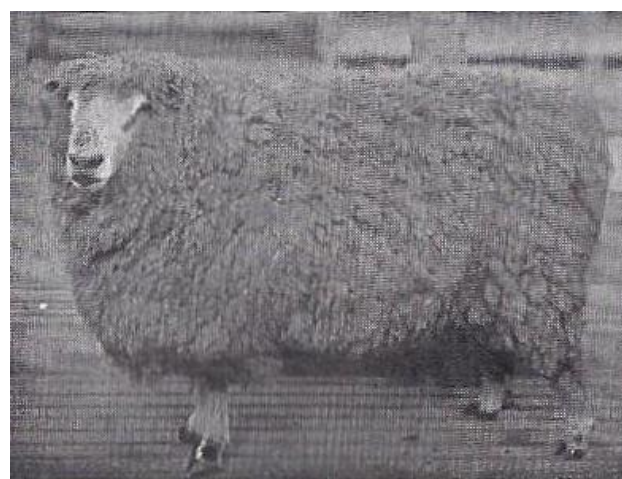


scale of operation and large numbers of animals this could easily be changed with planning within their own system.

I was very fortunate to class over 2,000 Suffolk ewes for their future breeding programme and selecting an elite group of rams to use through ET and AI from over 400 young home bred rams. I found individual animals that would rival the best Suffolk in Australia, New Zealand or Britain. Especially for muscle and skeletal structure. The biggest downfall for culling was bad mouths, hocks and black wool fibre.

Two representatives of Sino and an interpreter are presently in Australia visiting stud farms in NSW and WA. It is anticipated that they will select rams from several breeds to export back to Inner Mongolia.

Above article is thanks to The Muster of Australian Breeders of Stud Sheep, Issue 117, May 2023



*'English Leicester ram of good robust type, with great weight and quality of wool'.*

Advertising blurb from RDD Maclean's Maraekakaho Station, Hawkes Bay, found in the Pastoral Review of January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1916.

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## A Bit of History,

Otago Daily Times 15<sup>th</sup> August 1927,  
Via National Library, Papers Past

To The Editor

SIR. – Otago is what one might call a little bit of Scotland, and it was quite natural that settlers in these parts would favour the Border Leicester, which is essentially a Scottish sheep, - and as long as London, “the consumer of our meat,” was satisfied to take the heavy carcase of mutton or lamb, settlers were quite wise to stick to their pet sheep; but the time has arrived when London says, “We don’t like your heavy carcasses; in fact, we never did, but we have just put up with them, so long as they were cheap enough. We have always favoured those sent from Canterbury; they are such nice plump carcasses, and cut up much better than the bigger ones, and we were pleased very early in the meat trade to call them “prime Canterbury,” and were always prepared to pay bigger prices for them.”

These are hard facts which even a Scotchman cannot ignore. It therefore is wise to stop and think, as good King Bruce of Scotland did when he watched the spider. And in the midst of our thinking, we might ask ourselves, how did Canterbury obtain that early distinction in her lamb? To find that out accurately we must go right back to the beginning of the sheep raising industry. The first sheep imported into New Zealand was the Merino, and there was no part that suited them so well as the northern part of the South Island. It was, however, early found that the Merino was quite unsuited to freezing, as it was so dark fleshed. In the year 1865 Mr P. C. Threlkeld, of Inglewood, Flaxton, imported from England the English Leicester, and by the year 1882, when it became possible to export mutton and lamb in a frozen state, the English Leicester had become very numerous in Canterbury. It was also found that the English Leicester, mated with the Merino ewe, gave the ideal freezer and also an excellent wool sheep. That being so, there is little wonder that Canterbury sheep raisers have stuck so tenaciously to the English Leicester, and it is just a matter for very serious thought whether the Otago sheep raisers should not give more consideration to the English Leicester than they have done in the past.

As stated above, the ideal freezer is the English Leicester-Merino cross, but wide experience has been obtained with other breeds such as Romney, Border Leicester, or even the New Zealand-bred sheep, the Corriedale, and the results are splendid in every case. They are a wonderfully easily kept sheep, and I make bold to say three can be kept for two of any other of the long-woolled breeds, and what is more the rams can be obtained cheaply compared with most other breeds. It therefore seems plain to me that if Otago wishes to rival Canterbury the English Leicester must be used, and then we shall see “prime Canterbury” going from Dunedin.

GEORGE RUDDENKLAU

Oamaru, August 11th



## FOR SALE, ETC

**Sheep Breeds posters are available at the Office.**

Contact: [greg@nzsheep.co.nz](mailto:greg@nzsheep.co.nz)

## Note: CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

***FREE small advertisements are available for member breeders with surplus stud sheep for sale. Full, 1/2 or 1/4 page ads may have a charge. Talk to Greg!***

Remember the “Sheep NewZ” goes up on the website, available to be read by anyone with an interest in sheep!!!

Email adverts to the Editor or [greg@nzsheep.co.nz](mailto:greg@nzsheep.co.nz)

**The Closing Date for next issue will be November 20<sup>th</sup> for the December 2023 newsletter.**

**Please get items in well before the deadline!!!**

**“FEATURE BREED” will be Charollais**

If you would like to be part of this section or the newsletter, **photos and stud histories of All Breeds are accepted at any time for next issue.**

**EMAIL OR POST TO THE EDITOR** – see front page for address details.

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Email: [greg@nzsheep.co.nz](mailto:greg@nzsheep.co.nz)

Phone: (03) 358 9412

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